

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 16, 2002

The Honorable Tommy Thompson
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We are writing to express our deep concern that the National Institutes of Health may be asked to provide \$200,000 of federal grant monies to fund a program that could have the unintended consequence of harming the health of our nation's youth.

The University of Wisconsin has announced its intention to request federal dollars to fund a program designed to influence policy makers in regards to HIV/AIDS, infertility, and other areas of sexual health. While this goal appears well intentioned, our concern is that this program will not be based upon sound science and will actually be intended to undermine the very policies that have been found to be most effective in reducing teen pregnancy, abortion, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and protecting the health of America's youth.

In an article published October 9 in the Wisconsin State Journal, John DeLamater, director of the planned program stated, "We absolutely know that [abstinence education] doesn't work." We are uneasy supporting any "scientific research" that is tainted with such personal bias and intentionally designed to ignore scientific reality.

When dealing with critical issues such as encouraging healthy lifestyle choices by teenagers, there is no room for individuals to cloud research with their personal agendas. Certainly, the director of this program has made his agenda quite clear and it ignores the science in regards to the positive impact of both promoting and practicing sexual abstinence. We therefore have no other conclusion than to believe that this program would not produce fair and balanced work. The health of our children is too important to entrust to those who put personal biases above sound public health science.

As you know, research has consistently shown the effectiveness of abstinence education programs. Just last month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released The 2001 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) report which found that a majority of high school teens are now virgins. This is a marked turn around in the proportion of students who are sexually active and those who have chosen abstinence over the past decade. These dramatic increases in the number of teenagers

who have chosen abstinence strongly correlates with the implementation of abstinence education programs across the nation.

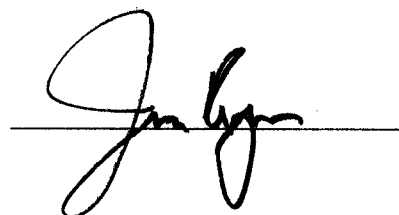
Contrary to the opinion of Mr. DeLamater, abstinence education programs have been effective in reducing the sexual activities of America's youth. The Heritage Foundation recently identified 10 scientifically evaluated abstinence programs that have reduced teen sexual activity by 17 percent to 50 percent. Another study published in the current edition of the American Journal of Health Behavior, found that students participating in a high school abstinence program were more likely to remain virgins, less likely to engage in sexual intercourse and more likely to indicate their intentions to remain abstinent. HIV prevention programs in Uganda have primarily emphasized abstinence and have been recognized globally for their dramatic success in reducing HIV prevalence in the nation by 50 percent over the past decade. Likewise, a USAID funded abstinence program in Zambia has proven to effectively reduce teen sexual activity and, as a direct result, reduce HIV infections. Because of the overwhelming evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of abstinence education, we respectfully disagree with Mr. DeLamater's dismissal of their effectiveness.

We ask that the National Institutes of Health reject the University of Wisconsin's request for funding of their graduate fellowship program. This program would clearly ignore sound science that has proven abstinence is the most effective health approach to protect the health of teens and most likely promote the tried and failed unhealthy view of teenage sexuality and sexual practices that condones promiscuity and relies on contraception with well documented inherent shortcomings.

A report released earlier this month found the increasing number of teens embracing abstinence has contributed to the drop in the U.S. abortion rate. This good news is evidence of the impact of successfully promoting abstinence. Yet much work remains if we are to finally eliminate the scourge of abortion and STDs. We would therefore encourage the Department of Health and Human Services to provide funding for research to better understand the value of abstinence-only education in terms of prevention of STDs, unwanted pregnancies and other negative health consequences that result from becoming sexually active at a young age. This research will add to the large body of evidence that already shows the effectiveness of abstinence programs and would help in our shared efforts to promote and protect the health of America's children.

Thank you for your continued commitment to abstinence education. We look forward to continuing to work together to promote and support public health programs based upon sound science.

Sincerely

Handwritten signature of Dan W. Elder MD, written in black ink over a horizontal line.Handwritten signature of John H. ... in black ink, written over a horizontal line.

~~W. A. Brown~~

Henry E. Brown

Sam Johnson

B. E. Chaffer

Jim DeMont

W. Colla Armin

Off. F. K. K.

Melvin Hart

Alvin Smith

Ing. P. H. K.

Jim Getknecht

John T. Doolittle

John M. M. M.

Robert F. Alexander

Joe Wilson

Steve Clark

Ernest J. J.

Sue Myrick

~~Ernest J. J.~~

John J. J.

Chris Pura

John N. Hostettler

Mark Sonder

Jo Ann Davis

Donald A. Manzella

Dan Vitte

John Kelly

Pete Hochman

Letter to Secretary Thompson re: University of Wisconsin Grant

Signers

1. David Weldon
2. Jim Ryun
3. Kevin Brady
4. Gil Gutknecht
5. Henry Brown
6. John Doolittle
7. Sam Johnson
8. John Shadegg
9. Bob Schaffer
10. Robert Aderholt
11. Jim DeMint
12. Joe Wilson
13. Todd Akin
14. Steve Chabot
15. Jeff Flake
16. Ernest Istook
17. Melissa Hart
18. Sue Myrick
19. Chris Smith
20. Roscoe Bartlett
21. Joe Pitts
22. Randy Forbes
23. Mike Pence
24. John Hostettler
25. Mark Souder
26. Jo Ann Davis
27. Donald Manzullo
28. David Vitter
29. John Sullivan
30. Pete Hoekstra